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Editorial: Raising fuel standards is one way to ease pain

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Amid all the grandstanding and chest-thumping over high gasoline prices, at least one good idea has emerged to combat the pain consumers are feeling at the pump.

With average prices edging toward \$3 a gallon, President Bush is asking Congress for the authority to raise vehicle fuel economy standards.

The proposal will not ease the suffering any time soon, but it is long overdue, and it will help future generations avoid some of the pain motorists are experiencing today.

Current CAFE, or corporate average fuel economy, standards call upon U.S. automakers to make their fleets average 27.5 miles per gallon for passenger cars.

But that level was set about 20 years ago; in the time since then, gas prices have skyrocketed, culminating with the high costs we are seeing today.

Most consumers see this as an economic issue, but it also is a national security concern, something the president touched on during his State of the Union address earlier this year.

While Bush requested the authority to raise the fuel efficiency standard, he did not specify a target level, White House spokesman Al Hubbard told the media.

If lawmakers have the backbone to grant the request, it will be a reversal of earlier positions, although Reps. Sherwood Boehlert, R-N.Y., and Edward Markey, D-Maine, have been trying to raise the standard for years.

Other congressmen have tried to paint the oil companies as sinister profiteers. Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., likened their image to that of a "satanic cult" on a recent segment of "Imus in the Morning," the national talk show simulcast on radio and cable TV.

Federal officials may join the oil companies in the image department if they rail against the industry without addressing the problem with a forward-looking national energy policy.